

Where Buffalo Roamed Now Sleeping Valley  
by Charles Denning  
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Going west at Silver Point, we turned to the right off State 141 just before crossing the bridge over the Tennessee Central tracks.

Down we wound through a series of curves.

This is Buffalo Valley,” Mrs. E. H. Maddux said. “This is the trail the buffalo took from their higher grazing lands down to the Caney Fork River.”



We slowed the car, imagining an ambling fleet of giant, brownish-black animals, seeming to stray but actually setting an inevitable course toward the river.

They were 5 or 6 feet tall and 10 to 12 feet long and the bulls frequently weighed a full ton. Long coarse hair covered their head, neck and hump, and a beard grew from their chin and small curled horns from the forehead of the disproportionately

large head.

To our right, Interstate 40 was literally a highway in the sky, planing along above our heads on massive fills and shelves hacked into the rocky cores of the hills.

The cuts laid visible cliffs of strata like the edge of a unopened book, rising sheerly from the roadside in layers of pastel browns, grays and pinks.

To the left, the valley seemed unchanged. The highway did not appear to have intruded upon the sequestered coves, the quiet farms.

Corn ripened and tobacco, the leaves almost as big as ironing boards, had begun to mature from green to yellow.

Thin lines of trees along fence rows or single trees which had been spared the axe, tufted the pastured flanks of the velvet green hills capped typically by a knob or band of woods. The county had the texture of chenille, seemed lush, rich, throbbing with fertility.

Contrasting Buffalo Valley in the days when it was a cornucopia with its modest status today, someone said, “the bottom rail gets on top.”

Mrs. Maddux born Elmo Nichols in Buffalo Valley, said, tongue-in-cheek, “We used to look up to the ‘flat woods’ and sort of sneer, and now they look down at Buffalo Valley and sort of sneer.”

The ‘flat woods,’ Mrs. Maddux said, was the area about Baxter and Cookeville.

People settled early on the fertile creek lands in the valley and a hundred years and more ago it was the breadbasket of the area.

Because of its productivity, the valley, a length of about 5 miles from Silver Point to the Caney Fork, was many years ago frequently referred to as “Egypt.”

In lean years, it is said, people would talk of going to “Egypt,” referring to Buffalo Valley, to buy corn and wheat.

Before the laying in 1890 of the Nashville and Knoxville Railroad, acquired by the Tennessee Central in 1903, small steamboats made regular runs on the Caney Fork, taking livestock and grain to market from western Putnam County.

The first railroad bridge was built with a center section which would turn to permit the passage of the small steamers. But when the bridge was washed down by the flood of 1902, it was rebuilt without the provisional section and the boats had to stop.

As late as the 1930’s, Buffalo Valley was the largest livestock shipping point in the county and one of the largest on the Tennessee Central. Until the 1920’s, a large sales floor for looseleaf tobacco was in operation.

At peak seasons as many as 100 railroad cars of hogs, cattle, sheep and produce were shipped out of the Buffalo Valley station each month.

Now, Buffalo Valley, the town, once the nucleus for the fruitful valley, is a dozing village, with one grocery store and a post office where the bank used to be.

A sudden summer rain peppers down, having come up along the rusting grass-grown iron tracks from the east. The heavy drops cut down like vertical scratches on glass. No one rushes indoors out of the rain, because no one is around.

We recalled a frigid, fog-haunted morning in late October, 1961, when at Delta junction on highway south of Fairbanks, Alaska, we came unexpectedly upon a small, free-roaming herd of bison, 37 in number, we learned later, a protected, multiplying herd.

The huge, humped beasts stood silently near the highway, black and sinister in the dim gray light, immobile as statuary.

As we cautiously approached to make a picture the herd began to recede cautiously, like a dark swell gradually lapsing back into history.

Having come within a hair's breadth of extinction, the watched over herds in western states increase, while the herds of Buffalo Valley are safely tucked into the past.

And the valley itself is thought of in the past tense.

When a native glances up at the new highway, lancing and narrowing his valley, and speak the work "progress," he sometimes seems to be asking a question.

He is remembering a Buffalo Valley that once was.

Herald – Citizen, Cookeville, TN - 3 June 2003 – Centennial Edition  
News Department Profiles

**Charles Denning** is the executive editor of the Herald-Citizen. His job is to oversee all the news gathering, story writing, and publishing of the news each day.

He had worked here for a total of 36 years, beginning in 1965 and working a three-year stint, then attending graduate school at Tennessee Tech for a time, and then returning to this job in June of 1970.

Like most everyone who works here, he enjoys the variety of the tasks that fill each day.

"If you stopped in my doorway, you might find me writing the text (called 'cutlines') that goes under a picture, or 'sizing' a picture (determining mathematically the size it will be when it comes out in the paper), or proof-reading and editing stories or other materials that are about to be published.

"Or I might be talking on the phone to people who would like to write a column for the paper or would like to sell us editorial cartoons.

"Or I might be talking to someone who is ticked off about something we have done or have not done in the paper. I might be going through my daily mail or cleaning off my desk or the stacks of assorted papers and photos on the floor, which is an extension of my desk."

But those tasks are not the ones he enjoys the most, he said.

"What keeps me going, my deepest satisfaction, comes from the process of asking questions and collecting information and, with total focus and attention, framing it into a story, word by word, sentence by sentence, inside my mind and then on the screen of my computer.

“I can get a real ‘non-chemical’ high out of that. If someone reads it and tells me it was ‘a good story,’ I like that. But if no one does, that’s okay too. That one is behind me, and I’m on my way to the next.”

He also likes working with the reporters and photographers to find and develop ideas for stories and pictures, something that is done daily.

“To turn an idea over and over, to consider it, feed it, watch it evolve into a finished work on the printed page. This is, I think, one of the two most important things I do as an editor – listening, asking questions, encouraging people. Working as a news writer is always tough, always stressful, and the people who do it need all the support they can get.”

He likes to allow the staff the freedom to think and create on their own, with the understanding that they may come to him for guidance when needed.

“I’m not needed for all routine stuff,” he said. “We are well organized. Our people are intelligent and know their jobs. If they need my help, it’s mainly when an unusual problem comes up, when there are those ‘What do you think we should do about this?’ questions.”

He was born in Troy, TN, which is in Obion County. His parents, the late Owen and Ople Denning, were farmers. His brother, Herman Denning, still farms near Obion. His sister, Naomi Gothard, lives in Madison, TN and works for the Nashville Chamber of Commerce.

He graduated from Troy High School and later attended the University of Tennessee at Martin and then graduated from UT Knoxville.

For a time after that, he worked for the Knoxville News-Sentinel. He served in the U.S. Air Force for four years and then worked for the Alaska State Employment Service in Anchorage for a time.

He and his former wife, Jeanette Keith, have a son, Ryan Denning, who lives and works in New York City. Ryan is a producer for a company which creates Internet web sites for corporations.

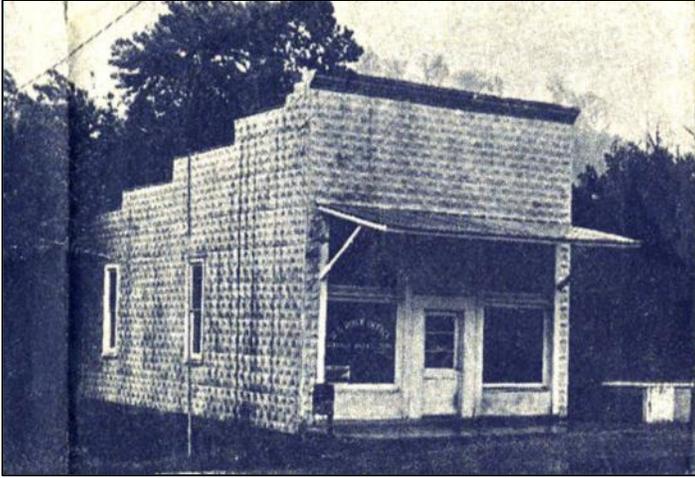
Charles is currently dating Martha Highers, formerly of Baxter, who is working on a PhD at the University of Louisiana.

His hobbies include walking and taking long hikes “out among the natural world” and going to “really original, out-of-the-ordinary movies, he said.

He also likes reading “any thought-stirring, change-my-life stuff,” trying to make “astonishing” photographs, tending to his dog, Solo, and “talking to interesting people.”

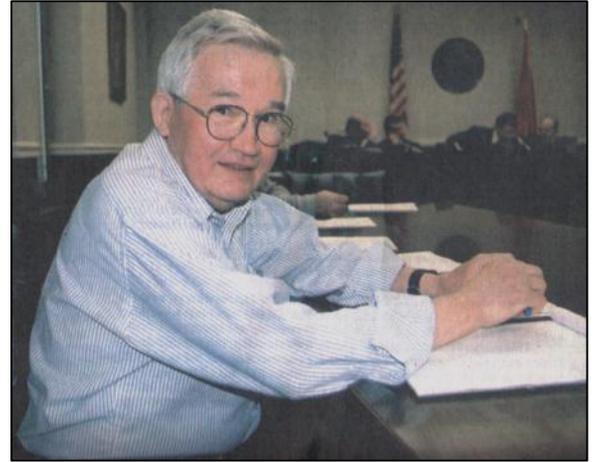
He can and does talk to the dog, he said.

“But the dog speaks only in short, cryptic gestures, and I understand almost nothing he says – my stupidity, I’m sure.

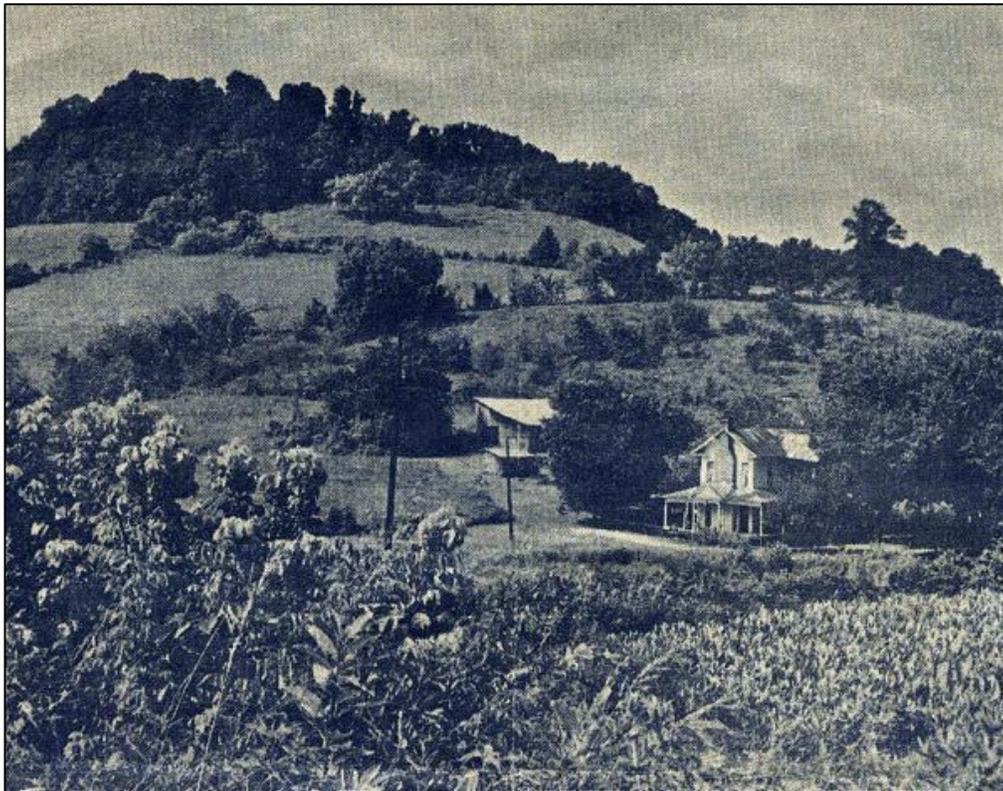


Once Was the Bank

The asphalt main street of the village of Buffalo Valley shines during a brief rain shower, is surrounded by memories of thriving commerce but is usually almost deserted these day. During the valley’s heyday, this building, now the post office, was the bank.



Herald-Citizen executive editor, Charles Denning taking notes at a City Council meeting.



AS SEEN FROM HIGHWAY: Beauty outside Your Door: No. 13: Old residence of John Rankin Denny. Later rented to Othel and Levola Anderson Carr.

One of the many productive farms tucked in the hollows and coves of Buffalo Valley, this one sets just off Interstate 40 which runs the length of the 5-mile valley, once referred to as “Egypt” because of its fertile acres.

**Source:** Carolyn & Ted Huddleston: April 2005. **Her response when asked about the house pictured above.** She states that it was the home and farm of John Rankin Denny, s/o John Smith Denney & Nancy Henrietta Carlen.

John Rankin Denny, father of Lloyd, Tamer and Jerry's father George Harold Denny. John Rankin Denny always lived in that house when I was growing up for we called it the John Denny house. In later days, John lived where Dean Scruggs lived and probably died there, Tamer owned the place there close to Wanda Shanks--the big house on Hopewell Road, Buffalo Valley, TN. It used to be the Maddux home place, that is the house where Dean lives.

Othel Carr, rented the house after John Rankin Denny moved. He was b 22 October 1908--d 8 June 1987. His wife was Levola Anderson Carr (she came from the Tucker Ridge) b 3 October 1916--d. 13 October 1990--buried Crest Lawn Cemetery.

Othel Carr was a son of Leona & John Carr who are buried in the Smellage cemetery. Othel & Levola had a large family--13 or 15 children--they once won a prize at the Fair for having had the most children.

The house Othel Carr rented eventually burned down. I think John Denny did live there--but Ted reminded me that it was once the Vaughn house. It's across the railroad track going toward the "Happy Hollow". OH, have you ever been to the "Happy Hollow"? That's where Ted Grandfather lived. It got its name from revival held there where everyone would get happy and shout. It was one of the main attractions of earlier days--men would hitch up the mules to wagons and load up all the people and actually it would become place of entertainment. They were called protractive meetings and later everyone said attractive meetings.

**Source:** <http://www.downeasttour.com/diamond/water-edge.htm>  
'Talking about protractive meetings'.

In spite of the absence of church buildings, it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of religion in the lives of the residents. Every family kept a copy of the Bible which was used as the standard text for secular as well as religious training. "Camp meetings," or "protractive meetings," as revivals then were called, were convened in summers and lasted for as long as three or four weeks. These services might have been conducted by a minister from any of several different denominations, but that was of no great concern to the worshippers.

"Denominationalism" had not yet taken firm root in the area and church affiliation was not considered of any critical significance. Different preachers of the same denomination might differ in their teachings on any particular point of doctrine. The meetings generally were well attended and held out in the open under the shelter of trees. Both the absence of resident ministers and the spirit of tolerance for other faiths later would prove significant.

In addition, the many camp meetings were a chance for those earnestly seeking the truth to study and compare the doctrines of the various ministers and their denominations. Among most of the faiths there were no great distinctions as almost all were caught up in the revivalist movement of the late nineteenth century. They primarily stressed Biblical "inerrancy" and "salvation by grace," and encouraged a free expression of religious emotions in their songs, prayers, and sermons...

\* \* \*

Crest Lawn Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

**Othel Carr** – b. 22 October 1908—d. 8 June 1987

*(s/o John Carr & Leona Carr)*

**Levola Anderson Carr** – b. 3 October 1916--d. 13 October 1990

Smellage Cemetery, Boma, Putnam Co., TN

**Carr, Leona** – b. 13 June 1887, TN – d. 25 February 1973

*(d/o John Wesley Carr & Amanda Oakes).*

**Carr, John** – b. 25 May 1875 – d. 11 May 1968

Rock Springs Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

**John Rankin Denny** – b. 3 January 1877, Rock Springs, TN – d. 24 September 1952, Rock Springs, TN

*(s/o John Smith Denney & Nancy Henrietta Carlen)*

**Ada Scruggs** - b. 1 August 1877, Rock Springs, TN - d. 25 June 1925, Rock Springs, TN

US Census 1900 — Civil Dist. 11 - Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 96 – Family 96

**Denny, John R.** Head W M January 1877 – 23 Married (# of yrs. married, 1) Farmer TN TN TN

*(John Rankin Denny, s/o John Smith Denny & Nancy Henrietta Carlen)*

**Denny, Ada** Wife W F August 1877 – 22 Married (# of yrs. married, 1) 1-1 (1 child born, 1 child living)

TN TN TN *(Ada Scruggs, d/o George Washington Scruggs & Sally Clark)*

Denny, Herrel Son W M July 1899 – 10/12 Single TN TN TN

US Census 1910 – Civil Dist. 11 – Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 142 – Family: 142

**Denny, John R.** (John Rankin) Head M W 33 Married (# of yrs. married 11) Farmer –

General Farm TN TN TN

**Ada (Scruggs)** Wife F W 32 Married (# of yrs. married 11) 6-6 (6 children born, 6 children living)

TN TN TN

**Harold** Son M W 10 Single Student TN TN TN *(George Harold Denny md Emma Lyon Whitaker)*

Lotis B. (Gladys Beatrice) Dau. F W 9 Single Student TN TN TN *(Gladys Beatrice Denny md William “Wil” Bradley Alcorn)*

Buna V. Dau. F W 8 Single Student TN TN TN *(Buena Vista Denny md Eugene Eschol “Dock” Medley)*

**Lloyd D.** Son M W 7 Single Student TN TN TN *(Lloyd Denton Denny md Verta Mae Medley)*

Dimple S. Dau. F W 4 Single TN TN TN *(Dimple S. Denny md William Claude Garrison)*

**Tamer S.** Son M W 2 Single TN TN TN *(Tamer Jones Denny md Clara Nell Ashburn)*

US Census: 1920 – Civil Dist. 11 – Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 166 Family: 167 Line: 42

**Denny, John** Head 43 M W Married Farmer General Farm TN TN TN

*(John Rankin Denny, s/o John Smith Denny & Nancy Henrietta Carlen )*

**Denny, Ada** Wife 42 F W Married TN TN TN *(Ada Scruggs, d/o George W. Scruggs & Sally Clark)*

**Denny, Harold** Son 20 M W Single Salesman General Store TN TN TN

*(George Harold Denny md Emma Lyon Whitaker)*

Denny, Gladys Dau 19 F W Single Cashier Bank TN TN TN *(Gladys Beatrice Denny md Will Bradley Alcorn)*

Denny, Buena Dau 18 F W Single TN TN TN *(Buena Vista Denny md Eugene Eschol “Dock” Medley)*

**Denny, Lloyd** Son 16 M W Single TN TN TN *(Lloyd Denton Denny md Verta Mae Medley)*

Denny, Dimple Dau 14 F W Single TN TN TN *(Dimple S. Denny md William Claude Garrison)*

**Denny, Tamer** Son M W 12 Single TN TN TN *(Tamer Jones Denny md Clara Nell Ashburn)*

US Census 1930 – Civil Dist. 11 – Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 21 Family: 21 Line: 93

**Denny, John R.** Head M W 53 Married (21 yrs. old married) Farmer Tobacco Crop TN TN TN

*(John Rankin Denny, s/o John Smith Denny & Nancy Henrietta Carlen)*

**Denny, Marena** Wife F W 27 Married (23 yrs. old married) TN TN TN

*(2<sup>nd</sup> w/o John Rankin Denny, Marena Norma Carr, d/o Elija P. Carr & Delia McCully)*

Denny, Tammer Son M W 22 Mail Carrier – Rural Route TN TN TN

*(Tamer Jones “Buck” Denny md Clara Nell Ashburn)*

**US Census 1930 –Civil Dist. 11 – Putnam Co., TN**

Dwl: 135 Family: 135

**Carr, John Head** M W 56 Married (27 yrs. old married) Farmer General Farm TN TN TN

**Carr, Leona** Wife F W 50 Married (21 yrs. old married) TN TN TN

Carr, Ellis Son M W 24 Single (Farm laborer) TN TN TN

**Carr, Othel** Son M W 22 Single (Farm laborer) TN TN TN

Carr, Beula Dau F W 13 Single TN TN TN

Carr, Olan Carr Son M W 11 Single TN TN TN

<http://www.ajlambert.com>